

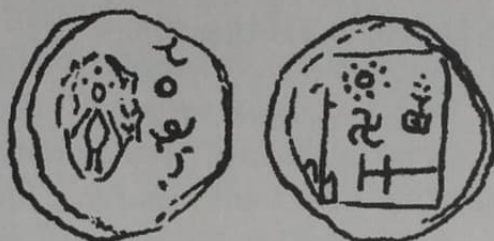
IV

Coins of Sujyeshtha



Mr. Raj Kumar Aggarwal has collected the following interesting coins from Sugh during the last more than fifty years.

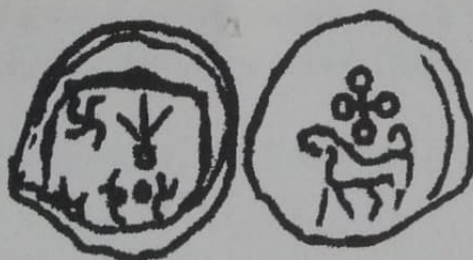
1. Lead, round, 2.0 cm, 7.044 g.



Obv. Gaja-Lakshmī on left, perpendicular legend in early Brāhmī characters on right *Sujeṭhasa*.

Rev. Within a square incuse laterally placed banner (*dhvaja* or *patākā*) symbol below, sacrificial or śūlagava symbol on left, *svastika* in the centre with a circlet having eight pellets around and probably a tree in railing on right (Fig. 18.1).

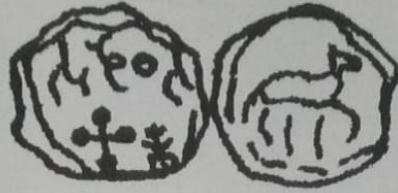
2. Lead, round, 1.85 cm, 2.377 g.



Obv. Within a squarish incuse with rounded corners *svastika* on left and tree in railing on right above and legend below *Sujeṭhasa*.

Rev. Lion with up curled tail to left with Ujjain symbol above (Fig. 18.2).

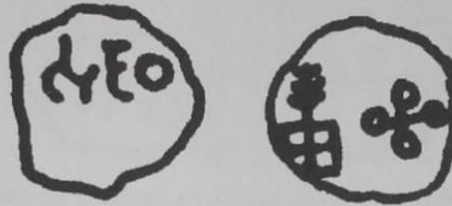
3. Lead, round, 1.0 cm, 1.175 g.



Obv. Legend *Sujeshasa* above, Ujjain symbol and another symbol (tree in railing) below.

Rev. Horse or deer to right (Fig. 18.3).

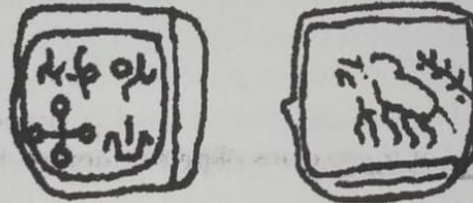
4. Lead, roughly circular, 1.2 X 1.1 cm, weight not recorded.



Obv. Early Brāhmī legend *Sujeshasa* in the upper portion.

Rev. Tree in railing on left, Ujjain symbol on right.

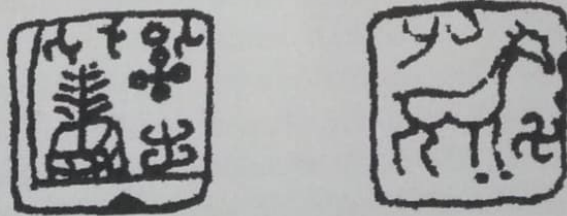
5. Lead, square, 1.1 cm, 1.650 gm.



Obv. Within a squarish incuse legend *Sujeshasa* above and Ujjain symbol on left and an *agni-kunḍa* on right below.

Rev. Elephant to left with a branch (or tree?) placed slantingly on its back, probably some object in front (Fig. 18.4).

6. Lead, square, 1.05 cm, 0.947 g.



Obv. *Sujeshasa* above; tree in railing on left below, Brāhmī *yya*-like *śrīvatsa* with Ujjain symbol above it on the right.

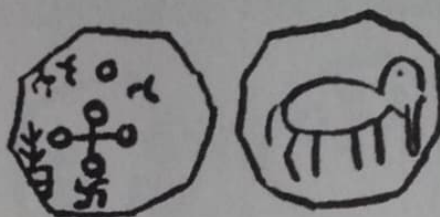
Rev. Horse or deer to right with *svastika* in front, some symbol (or symbols) above on the back (Fig. 18.5).

7. Lead, square, 1.8 cm.



Obv. Lion with up curled tail back, legend *Sujethasa* above.
Rev. Obliterated.

8. Lead, octagonal, 1.8 cm.



Obv. Ujjain symbol in the centre, legend *Sujethasa* above, tree in railing, *svastika* and probably inverted *nandipada* in a row from left to right below.
Rev. Elephant to right.

All the eight coins are made of lead, three being round, one is roughly circular, three are square and one is octagonal in shape. All show joining lines on the edges indicating clearly that the planchets were cast. All the three round coins show protuberances also on their edges. The deep incuses on the reverse of coin no. 1 and obverse of coins nos. 2 and 4 indicate that the cast planchets were struck by dies. This is an interesting feature of these coins. The octagonal shape of coin no. 8 is also very interesting.

Each of the eight coins represents a different variety. All of them, however, bear the name of *Sujetha* (*Sujyeshtha*) in early Brāhmī characters which may be assigned to the first half of the second century BCE, if not earlier.

The letter *ja* is interesting. It is not the usual English letter E type but somewhat typical with looped centre, the like of which may be seen in the Kalsi version of the Aśokan edicts. Kalsi is nearly 75 km northeast of Sugh and both the sites seem to have been connected by an ancient trade route running along the Yamunā River. Both the sites are known to have Aśokan connections.

It is interesting to note that a copper coin bearing similar legend in early Brāhmī characters as well as Gaja-Lakshmī motif, of an unknown provenance, was published by Ajit Ghose of Calcutta in 1954 from an unknown provenience.¹ This rectangular die-struck coin (0.95" in size and 120 grains in weight) bore the following details -

Obv. King riding a prancing horse to left preceded by a person with a water-pot in his right hand, Ujjain symbol on top. On left corner and eight-petalled lotus-shaped *Chakra* with spokes at top right corner, legend *Sujethasa* between the two symbols.



Fig. 18. Coins of Sujyēṭha (Sujiyeshṭha).

Rev. Lakshmī standing facing on lotus and holding flower in raised right hand anointed by elephants on circular raised area, traces of border lines to left and above circle.

Ajit Ghose observed that, "Here, however, we have a coin of a ruler whose name was Sujyēṭha = Sujiyeshṭha, and we may with a reasonable degree of probability, identify him with Sujiyeshṭha, who is the third in the line of Śuṅga kings as given in the *Vishṇupurāṇa*".² The learned editor (Prof. V.S. Agrawala) also endorsed this attribution "... The attribution of the present coin to a ruler of the Śuṅga dynasty who ruled at Vidiśā may be very likely, as suggested by the author".³

Sujiyeshṭha (variants Jyeshṭha and Vasujiyeshṭha) is said to be a son of Agnimitra in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and all the *Purāṇas* assign him a reign of seven years.⁴ Jayaswal⁵ had identified Sujiyeshṭha with Jeṭhamita (Jyeshṭhamitra) of Kauśāmbī coins as k manuscript of the *Vishṇupurāṇa* calls him Jyeshṭha and because Jyeshṭhamitra of the said coin is also connected with an Agnimitra.⁶ Commenting on the dynastic lists of the Śuṅga kings and the issuers of the Pañchāla series of coins,

Allan observed, "The only name found in both lists is Agnimitra, which is too common a name for any deduction to be made from it. Sujyeshtha or Vasujyeshtha has been identified with Jyeshthamitra (Jeṭhamitra), but the latter has no connection with the Pañchāla series, even if we were to accept the possibility of this connection".⁷

Bela Lahiri, too, has shown the un-tenability of the identification of Sujyeshtha with the Jeṭhamitra of Kauśāmbī or Pañchāla coins.⁸ Referring to the coin of Sujyeshtha published by Ajit Ghose she has observed that, "we cannot be sure of this attribution until a definitely assignable Śuṅga coinage comes to light".⁹ Another coin of Sujeṭha (Sujyeshtha) from Atranjikhhera in district Etah of U.P. was published by M.D.N. Sahi¹⁰ in 1968 and has also been subsequently described and discussed by R.C. Gaur.¹¹ Bela Lahiri did not take notice of this coin. Found from the upper phase (Sub phase B) of the NBPW Period from a deposit (ARJ 78/62), which is stratigraphically earlier in the same trench than that which yielded the coin of Kshatrapa Hagāmaśa (ARJ 71/62). This coin bears the following details —

Atranjikhhera, lead, 1.5 x 1.75 cm, maximum thickness 0.4 cm, weight 8.818 g.¹²

Obv. Lakshmī standing on lotus in the centre with twin stalk and lotus on either side of the deity. On each flower stands an elephant holding together a *Chhatra* (parasol) over the head of the goddess. Around her head is a girdle of dots. On her left towards the outer edge is a tree with multiple branches and thick leaves. Between the *Chhatra* and the apex of the tree over the back of the left elephant is the Ujjain symbol of which two orbs are out of flan. In the lower left margin runs the legend *Sujeṭhasa*.

Rev. Large Ujjain symbol with Brāhmī 'ya' in one orb. The signs in other orbs are indistinct.

Probably taking a clue from the coin published by Ajit Ghose, Sahi and Gaur have also attributed the lead coin from Atranjikhhera to the Śuṅga ruler Sujyeshtha.¹³

Some time back Dr. O.P.L. Srivastava too has published the following coin from Erach (25° 47' N & 79° 7' E) located on the right bank of the Betwa in district Jhansi in Uttar Pradesh —

Erach, bronze, rectangular (9 x 12 mm, 0.72 g), cast coin.

Obv. Forepart of an animal (elephant) to right, inverted *Indradhvaja* and Ujjain symbol in the upper row with early Brāhmī legend *Sujeṭhasa* below.

Rev. Taurine, *svastika* with elephant to right under these two symbols and a *Indradhvaja* along the right edge.

Srivastava too identifies the issuer as the scion of Pushyamitra — son of Agnimitra.¹⁴

Though these coins betray some common symbols like *svastika*, *Indradhvaja*, Ujjain symbol, elephant, Gaja-Lakshmī, etc. yet the popularity of all these symbols on early Indian coins does not help us to ascertain the identity of their issuers with certainty as they all show typological differences. Typological, metallic, proveniencial and metrological differences indicate that all of these coins may not have been issued by

the same potentate. The possibility of these coins to have been issued by a scion of Pushyamitra seems to be little as neither Sugh nor Atranjikhhera and Erach may have formed part of Śuṅga dominions after Pushyamitra. The coin of Ajit Ghosh was made of copper and Srivastava mentions his coin as that of bronze while all coins from Sugh and the one from Atranjikhhera are of lead. In spite of some symbols which were popularly used in those times Atranjikhhera coin does not betray similarity to any of the lead coins from Sugh and may have been issued by a different ruler. The exact provenance of the coin of Sujyeshṭha published by Ajit Ghose is not known and this coin too differs substantially from Sugh coins. It therefore seems more likely that this coin too was issued by another local ruler. Just like the names of Agnimitra, Sūryamitra, Gomitra, etc. which were very popular in those times Sujyeshṭha was another popular name during the second century BCE and was borne by different rulers who held sway in different territories.

Pliny had recorded that "India has neither brass nor lead but exchanges precious stones and pearls for them".¹⁵ Sahi, therefore, thinks that the lead coin from Atranjikhhera is perhaps the earliest lead coin of Northern India.¹⁶ We may mention here that Allan had published fourteen Kāḍa type coins and about a dozen more have been collected from Sugh half of which are made of lead as described in the foregoing pages. These coins were dated to third century BCE or early second century BCE by Allan.¹⁷ These coins must have preceded the lead coins of Sujyeshṭha at Sugh. Lead seems to have been used very commonly at Sugh and many other places in India as discussed in a following paper in the 3rd - 2nd century BCE. A lead human figure ascribable to *circa* 2nd century BCE has also been obtained from the site of Sugh and is preserved in Mr. Aggarwal's collection besides certain undetermined objects and even lead lumps. Recent studies have disproved Pliny's observation also. The process of the crystallization of lead from argentiferous galena leaving silver-rich residue seems to have been discovered in the third millennium BCE and lead objects from Mohenjodaro and Lothal containing 99.2% and 99.54% lead indicate that the metal workers could achieve a high degree of purity of lead. The (argentiferous) lead ore may have been obtained from Faranjā mine in Afghanistan and Rajpura-Dariba (80 km NE of Udaipur), Rampura-Aguncha (25° 50' N and 74° 44' 15" E, 15 km SE of Gulabpura near Ajmer) and Zawar (30 km SW of Udaipur) in Rajasthan.¹⁸ Wadia had referred to ores of lead in the Himalayas.¹⁹ Referring to the vast heaps of mine debris and a lead piece recovered from the slag dump containing 97.5% lead and 150 ppm silver at Rajupura-Dariba, A.K. Biswas has observed that "The evidences show 'the gregarious nature of working' of the Lead-Silver ore in the area during the successive Pre-Maurya, Maurya, Śuṅga and Kuṣāṇa periods of the Indian history".²⁰ Possibly, therefore, the lead for these coins may have been obtained from Rajpura-Dariba mines in Rajasthan or the Himalayas.

These lead coins seem to have been the local currency of Sugh. It is doubtful if Sugh and Atranjikhhera were included in the Śuṅga dominions during the reign of Sujyeshṭha. Sugh has not yielded any definitely attributable Śuṅga coins. Śuṅga Sujyeshṭha ruled for seven years but the eight coins published here and two coins

published earlier belong to different types indicating a longer rule of the king. The palaeography, too, seems to point an earlier date than that of the Śuṅga Sujyeshṭha. Ajit Ghose himself had observed that "in fact the epigraphy looks more Aśokan than Śuṅga".²¹ In the light of all these facts, it is difficult to accept this local coinage of Sujyeshṭha to have been issued by the Śuṅga ruler of this name.

Some historians believe that the Mauryan Empire had started disintegrating after Aśoka's death. The Indo-Greek invasions during the reign of Pushyamitra too seem to have decimated his dominions. Pushyamitra's grandson Vasumitra had led the imperial army against the Yavanas during the lifetime of his grandfather and defeated them on the Sindhu, which probably formed the boundary of the Śuṅga Empire. Many scholars identify this Sindhu with the Kali Sindhu in Central India. If this were so, the area northwards must have been out of the pale of Pushyamitra's empire. P.L. Gupta has shown that Mathurā, Kauśāmbī and various north Indian republican states had started issuing their coinages from about the middle of the second century BCE.²² Sugh thus must have definitely been out of the Śuṅga dominions during Sujyeshṭha's rule. Coins bearing the legend *Kāḍasa* in the early Brāhmī characters of late third-early second century BCE found from Sugh²³ furnish corroborative evidence in this connection.

Who issued these coins then? Probably a local ruler Sujyeshṭha. In fabric, shapes, metals, palaeography, etc. these coins betray affinities with Kāḍa coins but more evidence is required to establish a definite link between the two.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *JNSI*, XVI, pp. 59-60, pl. V. 2.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Lahiri (1974), *ISNI*, p. 51.
5. *Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, III, p. 147 and X, p. 206.
6. Lahiri (1974), *ISNI*.
7. *BMCAL*, p. cxx.
8. *ISNI*, chs. IV and V.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *JNSI*, XXX, pp. 56-60.
11. *Ibid.*, LVI, pp. 1-3.
12. Gaur has mentioned the weight as 8.85 gm.
13. *Loc. cit.*
14. Srivastava, Om Prakash Lal (2017), 'A Rare Coin of Sujyeshṭha from Erach', *ND*, Vol. 41, pp. 10-12; (2020), *Erach Rediscovered: Coins, Inscriptions, Seals and Sealings*, Mumbai: Rajgor's Heritage Hub, p. 54.
15. Schoff, W.H. (1912), *The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, New York, XXXIV. 17, p. 22.
16. *JNSI*, XXX, p. 59.
17. *BMCAL*, pp. xcil and 145.
18. *Mon. in Ancient India*, Vol. I, New Delhi, pp. 61, 62.